

HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT COLLABORATORS

For accommodation owners who are done wasting free stays on the wrong people.



INTRODUCTION

Let's be honest... if you've ever offered a free stay in exchange for "**exposure**" and felt like you got nothing back... You're not imagining it.

Not all collaborations are created equal. And some of them? **They're quietly costing you thousands.** Free nights. Your time. Your energy. And missed opportunities with the *right* people.

Collaborations can be one of the most effective ways to market an **accommodation business**, but only when they are approached with a **clear strategy**. Too many accommodation owners agree to gifted stays or influencer partnerships because they feel pressured, because the creator has a large following, or because they hope any exposure will be good exposure. **Unfortunately, that is often how businesses end up disappointed.**

A collaboration **should never be treated as a casual favour or an informal exchange.** It is a business decision. You are providing something of **real value**, whether that is a complimentary stay, an upgraded experience, meals, add-ons, or your time. In return, you **should receive value** that **supports your business goals**. That value might be high-quality content, stronger brand visibility, audience trust, direct enquiries, or future bookings. If there is **no strategy** behind the partnership, there is a very real risk that you will **give away revenue and receive very little in return.**

This guide is designed to **help you make smarter decisions about collaborations.** It will show you how to **identify the right type of collaborator**, assess whether they are truly aligned with your brand, **avoid common red flags**, and explain why having a proper **agreement in place is essential.** Most importantly, it will help you shift your thinking from "**free stay for exposure**" to "**strategic collaboration that supports bookings and long-term growth.**"



Kirsty | Social Bothy

WHY SO MANY ACCOMMODATION COLLABORATIONS FAIL

The **biggest mistake accommodation owners** make is assuming that any creator with a polished Instagram account or a decent number of followers will be a good fit. A beautiful feed does not automatically mean a profitable partnership. **A creator may know how to take attractive photos**, but that does not mean their audience is relevant to your property, trusts their recommendations, or has the intent and budget to book with you.



Many **collaborations fail** because the business owner has not clearly defined what success looks like before the stay even begins. If you do not know whether you want content for your own marketing, an increase in visibility, user-generated content for ads, more email subscribers, or actual bookings, it becomes almost **impossible to choose the right collaborator**. You may end up measuring success by likes and comments, when what you really needed was **content that made your accommodation** look desirable enough to book.



Another **common reason collaborations fail** is that expectations are too vague. A creator may say they will **“share the stay”** or **“post some stories,”** but without clear deliverables, timelines, and usage rights, there is nothing concrete to hold the **partnership together**. This is where **resentment starts**. The accommodation owner **feels taken advantage of**, and the creator may feel the **business expected more than was originally discussed**.

The truth is that **most disappointing collaborations** do not happen because **the creator is intentionally trying to rip anyone off**. They happen because there was **no clear plan, no proper vetting process, and no formal agreement**. That is why it is so important to approach collaborations professionally from the beginning.



THE REAL COST OF CHOOSING THE WRONG COLLABORATOR

One of the reasons **poor collaborations are so common** is that accommodation owners often underestimate what they are **actually giving away**. A complimentary stay is not free. It has real value.

Then there is the **opportunity cost**. If those dates had been sold to a paying guest, the true **cost of the collaboration would be even higher**. If the content delivered is low quality, off-brand, delayed, or never posted at all, the business has not just **missed out on a booking**. It has also **lost time, energy**, and the chance to **work with someone better suited to the brand**.

This is why collaborations need to be treated as **marketing investments**. Just like any other investment, they should be **assessed based on what they are likely to return**.

The goal is not simply to get **“exposure.”** The goal is to **gain something useful and measurable** that supports your business, whether that is **professional content**, a stronger brand presence, or more **direct bookings** over time.

If your nightly rate is **\$300** and you offer a two-night stay, that is already **\$600 in lost revenue**. Then there are cleaning costs, laundry, welcome touches, admin time, communication before arrival, time spent preparing the property, and any extras you include to make the stay feel special. When you add all of that up, even a **simple collaboration can easily cost several hundred dollars** more than you first realised.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF COLLABORATORS

Not every collaborator is meant to **achieve the same outcome**. One of the smartest things you can do as an accommodation owner is learn the difference between the **types of people you might partner with**, because this helps you avoid expecting one result from the wrong kind of creator.

1. **The first type is the content creator.** A content creator may not have a large or highly influential audience, but they are often **skilled at capturing beautiful, useful content**. They may be a great fit if your main goal is to **build up a library of images and videos** for your own social media, website, email marketing, or paid advertising. In this case, you are not necessarily choosing them because of their reach. You are choosing them because of the **quality of the assets they can create**.

2. **The second type is the influencer.** An influencer usually has a more established audience and **stronger visibility**. Their value is in their ability to **expose your property** to more people. However, reach alone is not enough. If their audience is not relevant, engaged, or interested in **travel experiences like yours**, then a high follower count will not lead to meaningful results. An influencer may help with awareness, but awareness **only matters if it reaches the right people**.

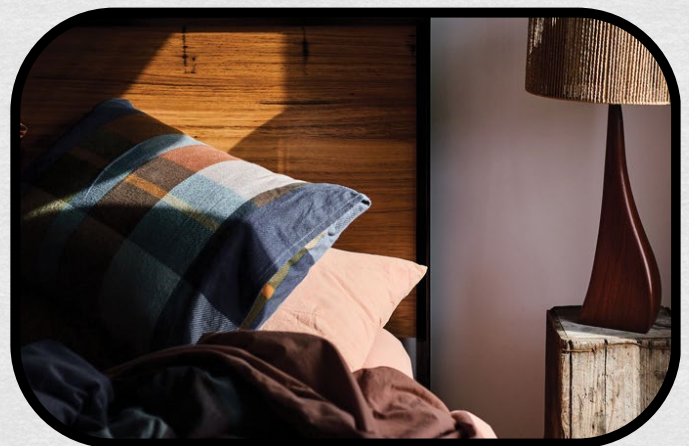
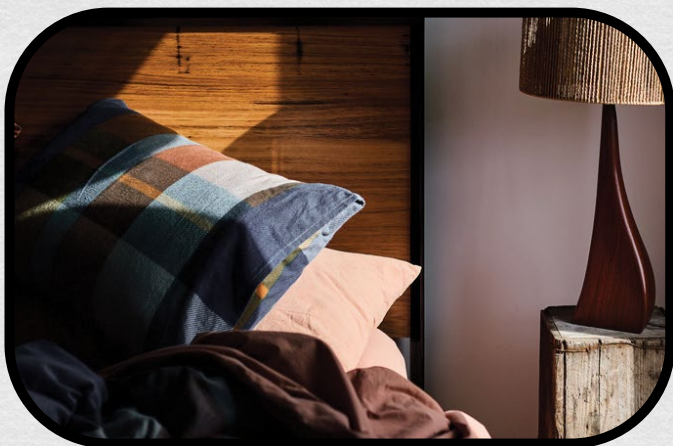
3. The third type is what many accommodation owners are really hoping for, even if they do not realise it: **a booking driver**. This is someone whose audience trusts them deeply, pays close attention to their recommendations, and is influenced by **how they tell a story**. Booking drivers do more than show a pretty room. They make people **imagine themselves staying there**. They create desire, context, and emotional connection. **This type of collaborator is much rarer, which is why careful selection matters.**

When you understand these differences, you **stop choosing collaborators based on appearance alone**. Instead, you choose them based on **what you actually need from the partnership**.

HOW TO KNOW WHETHER A COLLABORATOR IS ALIGNED WITH YOUR AUDIENCE

Audience alignment is one of the most important parts of choosing the right collaborator. Even the most talented creator is not the right fit if the people following them are not the kinds of guests you want to attract.

Start by looking at **who their content seems to speak to.** Are they attracting couples looking for romantic getaways, families wanting convenience and comfort, women wanting a relaxing escape, luxury travellers, adventure seekers, or budget-conscious road trippers? There is a big difference between a **creator who inspires aspirational travel** and one whose audience is **primarily interested in freebies, day trips, or content entertainment.**



It is also worth **considering the location of their audience.** If most of their followers are international, but your property relies heavily on domestic tourism, that may not be a strong match. Likewise, if your accommodation is positioned as a **premium experience**, you need a collaborator whose audience is comfortable with that price point. There is **no benefit in getting attention from people who love the content but would never spend the money.**

You should also consider whether the **creator's lifestyle and values match the experience you offer.** If your accommodation is peaceful, premium, and designed for guests who want to slow down, **a creator** whose content is chaotic, trend-driven, and heavily focused on nightlife may not help you attract the right kind of guest. Alignment is not just about demographics. It is about whether the creator **naturally attracts people** who would genuinely **appreciate and book your property.**

WHY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS MORE THAN FOLLOWER COUNT

Follower count is often the first thing **business owners notice**, but it is one of the least useful indicators on its own. A large audience **can look impressive**, but it tells you very little about whether the creator **has influence, trust**, or the **ability to motivate action**.

What matters more is engagement quality. Look at the comments under their posts. Are people saying thoughtful things, asking genuine questions, and responding in a way that suggests they **trust** the creator's recommendations? Or are the comments vague, repetitive, and generic? Comments like "nice pic," "love this," or strings of emojis may boost appearances, but they do not tell you whether the **audience is paying attention** in a meaningful way.

Look for signs that **people are imagining themselves** in the **experience**. Are they saying things like "I need to stay here," "This is exactly my kind of getaway," or "Adding this to my travel list"? That kind of response shows **the content is creating desire**. It shows the audience is not just scrolling past. **They are connecting** with what they see.

It is also helpful to **consider consistency**. Does the creator **post regularly**, or do they go long stretches without posting? Do they maintain a **steady standard of quality**, or is their content unpredictable? **Consistency usually reflects professionalism**. Someone who shows up regularly for their own audience is often more likely to show up **reliably** for a **brand partnership** as well.





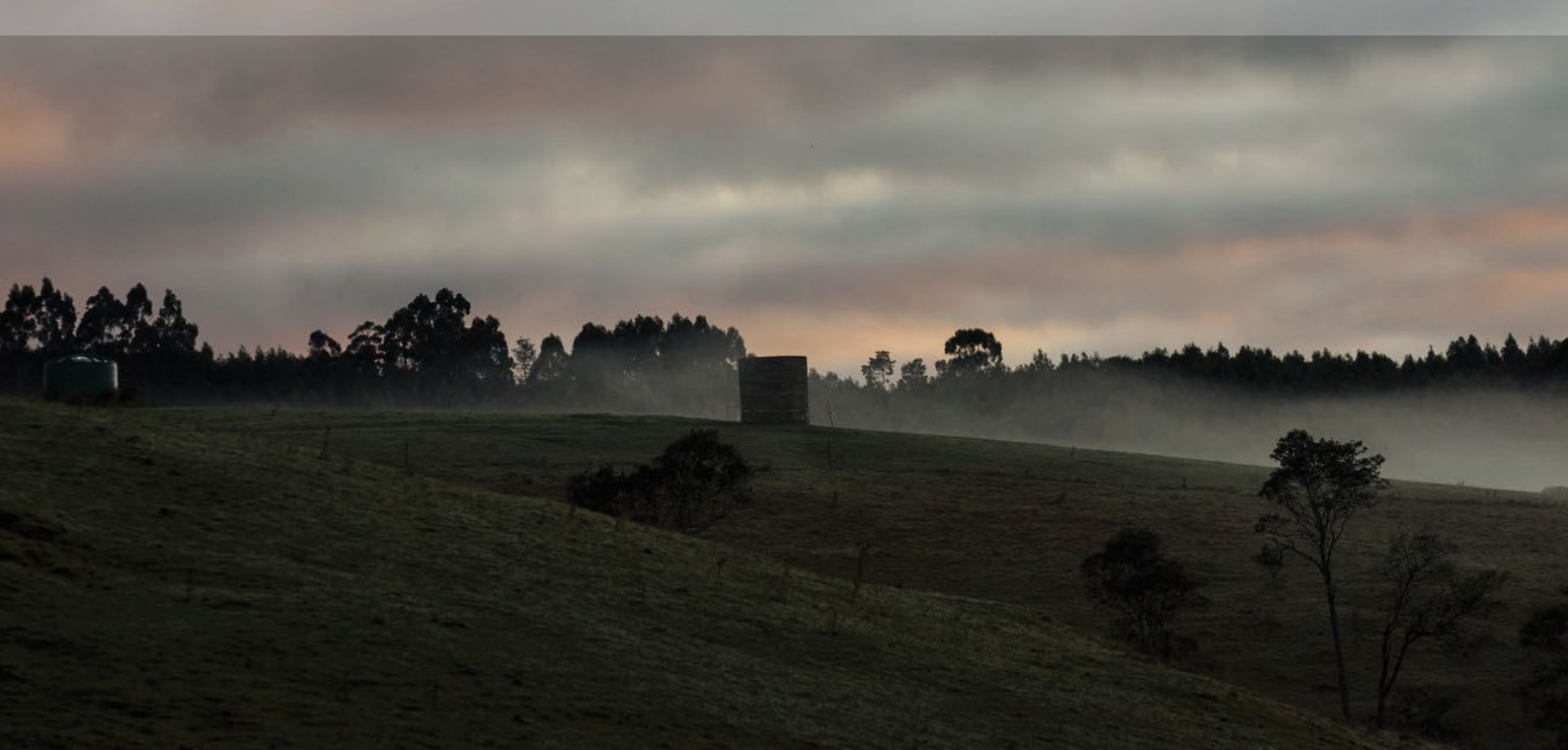
CONTENT QUALITY IS NOT JUST ABOUT PRETTY PHOTOS

A **common mistake** is assuming that **visually attractive content is enough**. Yes, aesthetics matter. Your property should be presented beautifully. But content that performs well for **accommodation businesses** usually does more than look nice. It helps the viewer **picture the experience** and **understand what makes the stay special**.

Strong content communicates **mood, detail, and story**. It captures not just the bed, the bathroom, or the view, but also the **feeling** of waking up slowly with a cup of coffee, arriving for a weekend away, enjoying the fire in the evening, or escaping the busyness of everyday life. People do not usually **book because** of a single image. They book because **the content makes the experience feel desirable and relevant to their life**.

It is also important to assess whether the **creator's style fits your brand**. If your business is warm, refined, and relaxed, then you need **content that reflects** that tone. If your property is family-friendly, you need a creator who can capture comfort, ease, and practical appeal as well as aesthetics. If your accommodation is romantic or luxury-focused, the content needs to feel aspirational and polished.

Good collaboration content should feel usable. Ask yourself whether you would **proudly repost it to your own channels**, place it on your website, or use it in a promotional campaign. If the answer is no, even if it looks nice, it **may not be the right fit for your business**.



THE IMPORTANCE OF CHECKING PAST COLLABORATIONS

One of the **smartest** and **most overlooked** things you can do is **look closely at a creator's previous brand partnerships**. Past collaborations often tell you a great deal about how they work, what they prioritise, and whether they are **likely to deliver value**.

Start by looking at whether they have **worked** with **businesses similar to yours**. If they have **collaborated** with **accommodation providers** before, review that content carefully. Did the posts **feel thoughtful** and **intentional**, or did they **feel** rushed and **transactional**? Did the creator **tell a story** about the property, **highlight meaningful features**, and make the **experience feel worth booking**? Or did they simply post a few generic images with **minimal effort**?

If possible, **contact the businesses they have worked** with before. Ask whether the **creator was easy to work** with, **delivered what was promised**, and **provided value beyond the stay**. You can also ask whether they would **collaborate with that person again**. These **conversations** can be incredibly **revealing** and may save you from making an **expensive mistake**.

Past partnerships can also show whether the **creator is oversaturated**. If they are constantly accepting free stays from similar businesses, **their audience** may become **desensitised**. Instead of the **collaboration feeling special** and **credible**, it can start to feel like they are simply collecting complimentary experiences. That **reduces trust** and **weakens the impact of any future post**.

BUDGET, VALUE, AND THINKING BEYOND “FREE”

One of the **most helpful mindset shifts for accommodation owners** is learning to stop asking whether **a collaboration is free** and **start asking whether it is valuable**. A collaboration that costs you **nothing upfront** can still be a **poor investment** if it brings in **no useful content, no audience trust, and no business return**. On the other hand, a **collaboration** that **includes a fee** or a **more generous package** may still be **worthwhile** if it produces **excellent content** or **meaningful bookings**.

Before entering any partnership, be clear about **your bottom line**. Know the value of what you are offering and **be honest** about what **you can afford**. Not every collaboration needs to **involve a complimentary stay**. Sometimes, a partial stay, hosted experience, meal inclusion, or content-only visit **may be more appropriate**. The structure should **suit your business model, seasonality, and goals**.

It is also **important to think about timing**. Offering a stay during **peak demand** periods **may cost your business** far more than hosting someone during quieter times. **Strategic accommodation owners** view collaborations through both a **marketing** and an **operational lens**. They think about occupancy, room value, staffing pressure, and **whether the dates make sense commercially**.

The point is **not to avoid spending money**. The point is to **spend wisely**. Every collaboration should have a **purpose**, and every offer should reflect the **true value** of what your business is providing.



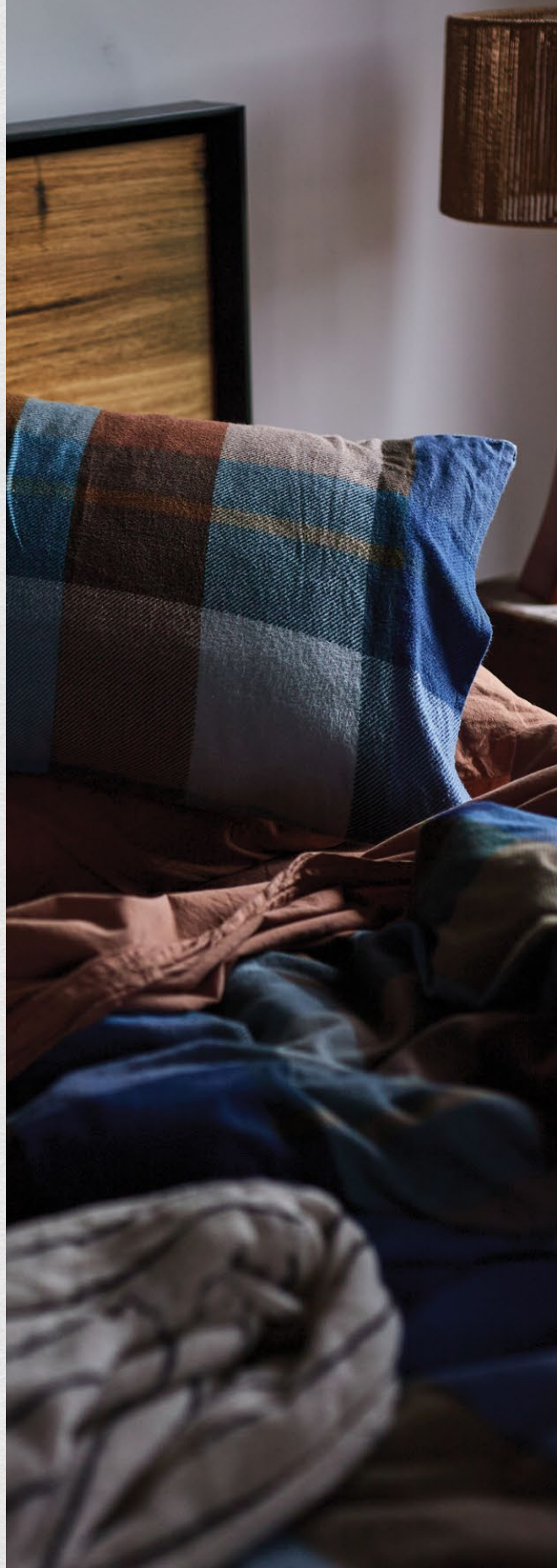
WHY A COLLABORATION AGREEMENT IS ESSENTIAL

This is one of the **most important parts** of the **entire process**. If you do not have **a written agreement** in place, you are leaving far too much open to **assumption, disappointment and risk**.

A few **direct messages** on Instagram **are not enough**. Even if the **creator seems lovely, professional, and easy to deal with**, relying on informal messages **creates problems**. Conversations can be **misinterpreted, forgotten, or left unclear**. Without a proper agreement, there is **no shared document outlining what was promised, what is expected, when content is due, or how the content can be used**.

A **collaboration agreement protects both parties**. It creates **clarity from the beginning** and helps **avoid awkward conversations later**. It allows you to approach the partnership as a **business arrangement** rather than a favour. It also **signals professionalism**. The right collaborators will not be put off by an agreement. In fact, **most serious creators will expect one**.

Having an **agreement in place** helps set the tone **for the entire collaboration**. It shows that your accommodation business values its time, its product, and its **marketing efforts**. It also makes it much easier to **confidently say no to people who are not willing to work professionally**.



WHAT YOUR AGREEMENT SHOULD INCLUDE

A **good collaboration agreement** should **clearly outline the deliverables**. This means exactly what content the creator is **expected to produce**. It should not say something vague like **“a few posts”** or **“social media coverage.”** It should **specify** whether that includes reels, stories, static posts, images, raw footage, or edited content. **The more specific you are, the less room there is for confusion.**

It should also **include deadlines**. State when the **creator’s stay will take place**, when **content must be posted**, and when files need to be **delivered to you**. Without timeframes, content can be delayed indefinitely, often reducing its value and causing frustration.

Usage rights are another **essential part of the agreement**. This is where many accommodation owners are **caught out**. Just because someone created content at your property does not automatically mean **you can reuse it however you like**. If you want to repost their content to your own social media, place it on your website, include it in email marketing, or use it in paid advertising, that needs to be **clearly agreed upon in writing**. You should also specify how long you can use the content for and whether any **credit requirements apply**.

Your agreement should also **outline the details of the stay itself**. Include dates, number of nights, inclusions, exclusions, and **any additional costs the creator is responsible for**. This helps **avoid misunderstandings** around extras, upgrades, meals, or special requests.

Cancellation and no-show terms are important as well. If the creator cancels at the last minute, does the stay get rescheduled? If they fail to deliver what was agreed, what happens next? These are not uncomfortable topics. They are standard **parts of running a business professionally**.

Finally, the **agreement should mention disclosure requirements**. Sponsored or hosted stays often need to be disclosed clearly, depending on the platform and local advertising expectations. **This protects both your business and the creator.**



HOW TO STRUCTURE THE COLLABORATION SO IT WORKS FOR BOTH SIDES

A **successful collaboration** should feel **mutually beneficial**. It should not feel like a **business is giving away value** in the hope that something good might happen. Nor should it feel **controlling or overly rigid for the creator**. The best partnerships are clear, respectful, and **strategically planned**.

Start by being upfront about the **purpose of the collaboration**. Let the creator know why you are reaching out, what you **love about their content**, and what you are **hoping to achieve**. This might be content creation for your brand, increased awareness during a specific campaign, or building a stronger library of usable visuals for future **marketing**.

Then explain **what you are offering** and **what you expect in return**. This should be framed professionally and positively. You are not demanding content. You are **defining the scope of a business partnership**. The clearer this is from the beginning, the easier it is to **attract people who are genuinely aligned** and willing to **deliver**.

It is also worth **giving the creator some guidance** on what **matters most to your brand**. You do not need to micromanage the creative process, but it is perfectly reasonable to **communicate your brand tone, key selling points**, and the **experience** you want highlighted. For example, you may want the collaboration to focus on quiet luxury, couples' connection, family comfort, or the uniqueness of your location. Without direction, the creator may miss the most valuable aspects of the stay.

When the **collaboration is well structured**, both sides know what they are doing, **what success looks like**, and how the partnership supports each other's goals.



TURNING COLLABORATION CONTENT INTO BOOKINGS

THE OTHER SIDE
OF THE GATE
A story about people,
produce and place

One of the **biggest missed opportunities in accommodation marketing** is failing to **use collaboration content properly** after the stay is over. Too many businesses repost a story or two, thank the creator, and then **move on**. That means they are only getting a **tiny fraction** of the **possible value**.

If you have chosen the **right collaborator** and secured the **right usage permissions**, the content they create can become **one of your most useful marketing assets**. You can use it across your Instagram feed, stories, reels, website galleries, landing pages, email campaigns, and ad creatives. You **can build seasonal campaigns** around it, use it to **support direct booking offers**, or include it in your pre-arrival communications to **strengthen guest excitement**.

The content **can also be repurposed** in different ways. A single reel might become several story slides, a website banner, a testimonial-style post, or part of a campaign that highlights a particular room or package. This is where the **return on the collaboration often grows**. The booking may not come directly from the creator's audience on the day the creator posts. It may come later because their content continues to work for your business **long after the stay has ended**.

This is why **usage rights and strategic planning matter so much**. When done well, a collaboration should not be a one-off moment. It should be something you can **continue to leverage** as part of your wider **booking strategy**.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Collaborations can be worthwhile for accommodation businesses, but only when approached thoughtfully. The right collaborator can **help you build trust, create desire, strengthen your content library, and attract the kinds of guests** you actually want more of. The wrong collaborator **can cost you money, time, and confidence.**

The goal is not to say yes to everyone. The goal is to choose partnerships that **make sense for your business, your brand, and your long-term growth.** That means looking beyond follower counts, asking better questions, setting clear expectations, and always having a **proper agreement in place.**

When you stop treating collaborations like hopeful exchanges and start treating them like **strategic marketing** decisions, everything changes. **You become more confident.** Your standards become clearer. Your brand feels more **premium.** And the partnerships you do choose are far more likely to support the thing that really matters - **more of the right bookings.**



QUICK CHECKLIST BEFORE YOU SAY YES

Before agreeing to any collaboration, please go through the checklist.

- Do they align with my ideal guest?
- Does their content make me want to book?
- Are deliverables clearly defined?
- Is there an agreement in place?
- Do I have usage rights?
- Do I have a plan after the collab?

If any of these pieces are missing, **PAUSE** before moving forward. It is far better to wait for the right collaboration than to rush into the wrong one.



READY TO ACTUALLY MAKE THIS WORK?



By now, you've probably realised something...
Collaborations aren't just about getting content.
They're about having a strategy behind them.
When you get it right, you get better-fit guests, more direct
bookings, and more confidence knowing you're not relying on
third-party platforms.

If you're ready to do this properly, send me
"GET BOOKED" and I will send you some details on how I can
help you achieve exactly this!

A huge thank you to Liz at Pa's Place for allowing me to use her imagery throughout

